DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 292 151 CS 506 068

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TITLE Responses to Indirect Requests in an Organizational Setting.
PUB DATE Feb 83
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association (Denver, CO, February 11-15, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; Discourse Analysis; Interpersonal Communication; *Organizational Communication; Role Perception; *Speech Acts; Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS Communication Behavior; Imperatives (Grammar); *Indirect Speech; Indirect Suggestion; Negative Affect; Request Procedure; Requests; *Superior Subordinate Relationship

ABSTRACT

A study analyzed responses to indirect imperatives in a large doctor's office, looking specifically at superior-subordinate relationships in an organizational setting in order to see if there are different responses to indirect and direct imperatives, and what those differences involve. Twenty hours of interaction were audiotaped and observed between 11 superiors and subordinates in the following roles (ranked from highest to lowest): two doctors, one administrative manager, four medical transcribers, two radiologists, and two file clerks. Immediately following all possible sequences, subjects were asked how they felt about the interaction, the persons involved, and "their work." These responses were analyzed based on certain communication rules, including: (1) language as action; (2) felicity conditions, or contextual parameters needed for a ritualized speech act to be successful; (3) indirect speech acts, such as irony, metaphors, insinuations, and indirect imperatives; and (4) organizational messages. Results showed that a high number of indirect imperatives (24 out of 29 requests) were used, most of which received immediate compliance. Noncompliance with an indirect imperative was usually caused by the lack of a preparatory felicity condition, i.e., before a request can be made, the receiver of the request must be responsible for the action and the sender should have the right to make the request. (A table of responses involving the felicity condition reason and three pages of references are appended.) (MM)

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RESPONSES TO INDIRECT REQUESTS IN AN ORGANIZATIONAL SETTING

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Presented At

Western Speech Communication Association

Denver, Colorado

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INTRODUCTION

Conversational analysts have looked at sentences and smaller units; however, scholars today (Hymes, 1969; Labov, 1970) recognize a need to go beyond only linguistic analysis, and take into account contextual elements of entire interactions (Garfinkle, 1972). One area currently investigated is speech act theory. The most common view of speech acts involves the purpose of or goal served by a given utterance (Searle, 1969). In relating utterances to their purposes, researchers must relate language to communication situations (Hopper and Naremore, 1973; Wells, 1973).

There has been various studies dealing with speech acts or a given type of speech act (Austin, 1962; Davison, 1975; Frentz and Farrell, 1976; Green, 1975). The present research examines one topic within speech acts theory, responses to indirect imperatives, looking at them in an organizational setting. Responses to indirect imperatives are analyzed based on previously discussed communication rules (Austin, 1962; Greene, 1975; Grice, 1975; Searle, 1969).

LANGUAGE AS ACTION

Austin (1962), considered the grandparent of speech act theory, argued that many ritualized utterances perform "actions" and that these actions could not be

accomplished in other ways: For example, the utterance, "I now pronounce you husband and wife" performs the act of marriage, an act which, in our culture, could not be accomplished any other way. Austin calls this the illocutionary force of the utterance.

Searle (1969) broadened Austin's definition. Searle argued that every utterance performs an action. For example, one can perform the action "bet" by sending any of the following messages:

1. "I bet you $10.00 the Dodgers will win the penant."
2. "Ten bucks say Dodgers are the best."
3. The following is a non-verbal response by John. Harry approaches John and says, "John, do you wanna bet ten bucks I can beat you at arm wrestling?" John sits at the table, and puts his arm in "ready" position.

The first utterance explicitly marks the action performed by using the word "bet." As demonstrated above, the actual name of the action (bet) is not necessary to perform the action (Bates, 1976; Searle, 1969). Although there does not exist a complete list of all speech acts (SCA Task Force, 1976), examples include betting, arguing, informing, imagining, ritualizing, commanding, controlling, feeling, ordering and requesting.

Other scholars also argue that language can be viewed as performing actions (Frentz and Farrell, 1976). Bates (1976) states that language can be viewed as accomplishing actions relevant to speakers' goals. Other researchers also study the goal accomplishment by language use under the term Communication Function (Hopper and

Wrather, 1978; SCA Task Force, 1976; Wood, 1977).

Thus far this section has briefly outlined current thought about language used to perform or accomplish an action or speaker goal. Although many terms have been coined (performatives, speech acts, illocutionary force and communication function), all refer to using language to accomplish goals or actions. Henceforth, the term "speech act" will be used to refer to the concept of language performing actions. Felicity conditions of speech acts are reviewed below.

Felicity Conditions

Austin (1962) states that for a ritualized speech act to be successful or felicitious, a set of conditions must be satisfied by the context. For example, if two people are getting married, they must be married by a justice of the peace, or someone of equivalent power, or the speech act will be infelicitious. Searle (1969) agrees with Austin's view that for any speech act, there are necessary contextual parameters called felicity conditions. He divides them into four categories and Wrather (1979) defines them as follows:

Propositional condition deals with the topic or content of an utterance. For example, when informing, the speaker states a proposition which may be true or false. It is not necessary for all speech acts to contain a propositional component. For example, "Hello," an

utterance which performs a greeting, does not have a propositional component (Searle, 1969).

Prepatory conditions describe those conditions which must be met by the context and are usually established before the utterance is spoken. For example, a person performing the speech act must have the necessary authority (Austin, 1962; Labov and Fanshel, 1977). Specifically, a boss requesting his/her secretary to type a report by 5:00 usually has that needed institutional authority. Further, in the case of a request, the addressee must be capable of carrying out the requested action: In the above example, the secretary must be capable of typing in order for the context to satisfy the conditions of the boss' request.

Sincerity conditions deal with the beliefs or feelings of participants. If a speaker speaks insincerely, the speech act is not nullified, but the speaker is guilty of an abuse (Austin, 1962). For example, a brother tells his sister he loves her, he must feel the love, or it will be incongruent with the speech act being performed.

Essential condition refers to the result of the utterance (Labov and Fanshel, 1977) and the committment of the speaker (Lyons, 1977; Searle, 1969). For example, in the speech act promising, the participants must believe that the speaker is committing him/herself to some future act.

Clark (1975), when discussing requests and applying these conditions to them, states that communicators tacitly agree to make requests only when these four conditions are satisfactorily fulfilled. Thus, when any one condition of any speech act is not satisfied, the speech act is in some way incomplete or infelicitious. Thus far, this section has reviewed current research on speech acts and felicity conditions. Indirect speech acts are discussed below.

Indirect Speech Acts

Often a speaker's meaning may involve more than just surface structure meaning (Searle, 1969). Some easily recognized examples include irony, metaphors and insinuations. Commonly, in everyday discourse, a speaker may use utterances and mean what she/he says, but also mean something more. For example, a wife may ask her husband to take out the trash by saying, "The trash can is full." Searle (1975) calls this an indirect speech act, and he defines it as one illocutionary (or speech) act that can be performed indirectly by way of performing another. For example:

Speaker 1: "Help me wash my car!"
Speaker 2: "I have to go to the store."

To understand is speaker 2's utterance is a rejection or acceptance to speaker 1's statement, it is necessary to separate the surface form meaning from the intended (or indirect) meaning. Searle (1975), using a theoretical apparatus to demonstrate how these indirect illocutionary

acts operate, states that co-conversationalists need mutually shared background information, a theory of speech acts and certain general principles of conversation in order to successfully participate in interactions.

One type of indirect speech act is the indirect request for action or information. For example, a supervisor in talking to his/her secretary could say: "Mary, can you type this by 5:00?" Searle (1975) calls this an indirect request. (This can also take the form of a direct request: "Mary, type this by 5:00.")

Searle (1975) cites four processes used in transforming a direct imperative into an indirect imperative. For example, instead of using the direct request, "Shut the door," the sender can focus on one of the prepatory felicity conditions of the request and say: "Can you shut the door?" Additionally, the speaker can focus on the propositional felicity condition of the direct imperative: "Will you shut the door?" Thirdly, the speaker can focus on the sincerity felicity condition: "I wish you would shut the door." Finally, the speaker can focus on one of the reasons for the request: "It's cold in here," imply that a closed door will make it warmer in the room and thereby requesting indirectly for the door to be shut.

Each of the above is henceforth considered a category of both a process to transform a direct imperative into an indirect imperative, and thus producing a category of indirect imperatives.

Green (1975) focuses on a topic similar to Searle's, that is, directing another's behavior. Green refers to this category of speech acts as imperatives. Although Green's main concern is not to identify surface structure form for orders, he does list the surface structure forms which can be used to identify an order. These surface structures are:

1. When performing an order, the sender believes she/he has the authority to control behavior of the hearer.

2. The sender expects to be obeyed when issuing an order.

3. Orders use a falling intonation.

4. Orders do not allow a close initial or final please.

5. Orders are reported with a tell rather than an ask, and may use a "why don't you" tag.

6. The sender of an order will be enraged by refusal.

7. Orders do not allow "if you will" tags.

8. The consequences of non-compliance to an order will be negative sanctions.

These structures then can be used as criteria in identifying all imperatives. Thus, if an utterance uses a falling intonation, allows for a close initial or final please, etc. (including all eight criteria), that utterance is an imperative.

Thus far, this section focused on issuing speech acts. The present research focuses on responses to indirect speech acts. Green (1975), while citing Grice's Cooperative Principle, argues that there are three possible responses to an indirect imperative: compliance, promise of compliance at a definite time, or the announcement of intention not to comply. If other responses would be made, the receiver would be labeled uncooperative or incompetent (Grice, 1975). The following section reviews organizational communication literature.

Organizational Messages

Communication in organizational settings has usually been studied in management. Past research in management began with what has come to be called the classical school of thought (Fayol, 1949; Taylor, 1911; Weber, 1947) where the concern was job-centered and production was the goal of management. Thus, management did not focus on messages within organizations.

The humanistic approach to management followed. Major works such as Mayo's "Hawthorne Studies" (1933) emphasized person-centered relationship between superiors and subordinates. McGregor's (1960) Theory X and Y, as well as Likert's (1961) Four Systems, developed ideas to encourage management and subordinates to become more directly involved with the organization in terms of, for example, decision making.

Current research focusing on communication within organizations takes a behavioral perspective (Koehler, Anatol and Applebaum, 1976), emphasizing messages which generate positive relationships between immediate supervisors and subordinates. Many scholars (Likert, 1961; McGregor, 1960) feel that this relationship is more important than any other factor in determining the attitudes and general happiness of employees. Blake and Moulton (1964) also suggest that effectiveness of the supervisor depends on his/her stress of interpersonal relationships as well as task accomplishment.

Based on the above research, it can be argued that those messages from supervisors to subordinates which are supportive will cause employees to feel more positively about their work. And, as the Hawthorne report (Mayo, 1933) demonstrated, employees who feel positive toward work will be more productive. The present research looks at and compares employees' responses to two types of superior originated messages: direct and indirect imperatives.

The purpose of the proposed study is to analyze responses to indirect imperatives in a large doctor's office, looking specifically at superior-subordinate relationships. Indirect and direct imperatives and their responses will be collected and compared. The major concern of the proposed research is if in superior-subordinate relationships in an organizational setting,

there is a different response to indirect and direct imperatives and what that difference involves. Specifically, the following questions are asked:

1. "Do employees comply more readily with either one?"

2. "Is there a more positive feeling about 'work' or 'boss' given either imperative?"

METHOD

Naturally occurring utterances and conversations (insofar as such are obtainable when observed (Garfinkel, 1967; Sanches, 1975)) provide the most productive potential data sources (Wrather, 1976). Collecting and analyzing naturally occurring data is often used in discourse research (Goffman, 1974; Halliday, 1973; Hopper, 1973; Hymes, 1969; Nofsinger, 1975; Phillipsen, 1975; Wood, 1976).

Collecting the Data

Conversations were collected in the summer of 1981 in a doctor's clinic in Los Angeles, California. Participants were superiors and subordinates in the following roles (ranked from highest to lowest): Two doctors, one administrative manager, four medical transcribers, two radiologists, and two file clerks, totaling eleven interactants. Observations were collected from all offices and situations involving each of the above.

Twenty hours of interaction were audiotaped and observed. Relevant non-verbal messages were noted. The

current researcher was occasionally a participant in interactions.

Immediately following all possible sequences, subjects were asked how they felt about the interaction, the persons involved and "their work."

Characterizing the Data

The following steps were used in characterizing the collected data:

1. Identify all imperatives using Green's (1975) criteria and mentioned in the literature review. This yielded 29 total responses.

2. Separate imperatives into direct and indirect imperatives using Searle's (1975) four methods of transforming direct imperatives into indirect imperatives. Thus, an imperative was considered direct if it did not follow one of Searle's methods for transforming a direct imperative into an indirect imperative.

3. Within the category of indirect imperatives, indirect imperatives were subdivided into four categories, each corresponding to one of Searle's four ways of transforming a direct imperative to an indirect imperative.

Analyzing the Data

Two dependent measures were used in analyzing the data: compliance and the feelings of the receivers. In analyzing compliance in the responses, 20 indirect

imperatives were complied with immediately or later; 4 were not. Four direct imperatives were complied with, and 1 was not. In analyzing the feelings of the receiver, the data revealed 15 indirect imperatives as positive feelings toward the receiver and 9 as negative feelings toward the receiver.

"Feelings of receiver" is operationally defined as either positive or negative. If following an imperative, receivers expressed negative feelings (example: "that jerk"), the imperative was classified as negatively received. Likewise, if receivers expressed neutral or positive feelings (example: "It's okay, I don't mind."), the imperative was classified as positively received.

"Compliance" is operationally defined as either carrying out the requested act or not carrying out the requested act. If following an imperative, the receiver non-verbally or verbally responded either immediately or in time, the imperative was classified as compliance. If the receiver did not intend to carry out the request, the imperative was classified as non-compliance. The above method for analyzing data was used for all 29 interactions.

RESULTS

The final total number of complete direct and indirect audible orders was 29, 5 direct imperatives and 24 indirect imperatives. Of the indirect imperatives, 5 were categorized as involving the felicity condition reason

(see Table 1). In addition, there were two related categories of indirect imperatives, reason co-occurring with a prepatory condition and reason co-occurring with a propositional condition; the former contained three interactions and the latter contained one. The category indirect imperative focusing on the preparatory felicity condition contained five examples. The category indirect imperative focusing on the propositional felicity condition contained six interactions.

Below are detailed examples of these categories of imperatives. For each interaction, its respective category is identified, pertinent contextual information in mentioned and a short synopsis is offered.

"Why Don't You"

CATEGORY: Reason

SETTING: This interaction takes place in the transcribing office with Bob, the administrative manager, entering. He looks at Jan, a transcriber.

BOB: "Why don't you throw a carbon copy on the end of this."

BOB EXITS

COMMENT: In this interaction, Bob indirectly told Jan, "Type a carbon copy." Jan complied by taking the paper from Bob and putting it in her typewriter. The indirect imperative was sent with a positive intonation and Jan expressed positive feelings by non-verbally smiling when taking the paper from Bob.

"The Snot"

CATEGORY: Reason co-occurring with a prepatory felicity condition.

SETTING: Peg, the file clerk, entered the transcribing office and leaned over Lil's desk. Lil is Peg's supervisor. Peg began looking at the charts lying on Lil's desk.

PEG: "Can you pick up those charts? I'm looking for a file."

LIL: "Well, how do you know I have 'em?"

PEG: "Cuz I looked in those files and I know you have 'em." (impatient intonation)

LIL: "Well, snot!"

Peg proceeded to find the file, placed papers inside it and left membling.

COMMENT: The focus of the comment is Peg's first utterance. Peg begins her utterance using a prepatory condition of the direct request, "Pick up this file." She then immediately provides a reason for making the request. Lil did not immediately pick up the files, neither did she forbid Peg to continue her search. This was counted as compliance. Lil does jokingly call Peg a name, "snot," at the end of the interaction. This was interpreted as expressions of some negative feelings. Lil's negative feelings may in part be due to the role relationship--a subordinate issuing a request for action from a superior.

"Can You?"

CATEGORY: Prepatory felicity condition.

SETTING: Bob, the administrative manager, came into the transcribing office and approached Jan.

BOB: "Do me a favor. Type this up for me. I have to read the report before I interpret the discussion the doctor wrote."

JAN: "Okay."

BOB: "Can you have it done by tonight?"

JAN: "Yes."

BOB: "Thank you."

BOB EXITS

COMMENT: Bob's second utterance, "Can you . . . ," is the focus of this analysis. Bob is indirectly requesting Jan to complete the work by "tonight." He does this by citing one of the prepatory conditions of the direct command, "Have this done by tonight." Jan complies immediately and later reported positive feelings toward Bob's indirect imperative.

"No Response"

CATEGORY: Propositional felicity condition.

SETTING: This interaction occurred between two subordinates. Jan was sitting in her office. Em walked down the corridor past Jan's open office door.

EM: "Would you answer the phones for a second?" (directed at Jan)

Em proceeded to walk down the corridor, not waiting for a response from Jan.

COMMENT: Em's utterance cites the propositional felicity condition of the direct command, "Answer my phone while I'm gone." Jan reported negative feelings following the request. She cited the rollowing reasons for her feelings: (a) not her job, and (b) Em did not have the authority to make the request (subordinate to subordinate).

"Changing the Subject"

CATEGORY: Direct Imperative.

SETTING: Bob, the administrative manager, came into the transcribing office and approached Pam, a medical transcriber.

BOB: "Take the paper out of your typewriter and type this for me." (He put the paper on her typewriter.)

PAM: "Can you tell me if a half-inch is a measurable atrophy?"

BOB: "Not really."

BOB EXITS

COMMENT: The first utterance of this interaction was a direct imperative from a supervisor to a subordinate. The immediate response of the subordinate was to change the subject of the conversation, thus putting off complying or not complying. Pam does, however, comply after her put-off. Pam reported her negative feelings by saying, "I will not let him control me," to the researcher.

The above interactions were presented as examples of the data. Table 1 summarizes the findings.

The results of the data revealed nine indirect imperatives with negative feelings, which may possibly be due to one of the following: (a) a subordinate giving an order to another subordinate, or (b) the responsibility of the requested action not being the one of the receiver.

Four out of the five direct imperative responses were reacted to negatively by the receivers. The one remaining response to a direct imperative, a direct request for information, was the only direct imperative that was positively received.

From this data collected, the following inferences can be made:

1. When receiving an indirect imperative which does not involve his/her responsibility, the hearer will comply, but will not feel positively about some aspect of the interaction.

2. When an indirect imperative is sent from subordinate to another subordinate, compliance is associated with negative feelings.

3. When an indirect imperative is sent from subordinate to supervisor, the supervisor will comply in time, but will feel negatively about the speaker.

DISCUSSION

One major finding which was not anticipated was the number of indirect imperatives used in this setting. Out of 29 interactions involving requests for action, only 5

were direct requests. This is particularly surprising since indirect imperatives are more ambiguous than direct imperatives. If superiors wanted to alleviate ambiguity in their messages, they should not use an indirect request. Only a few indirect imperatives gave rise to further negotiation of meaning.

The amount of compliance with direct requests was somewhat surprising. It was thought subordinates would not comply as readily with direct requests. Though the feelings of the receivers were almost unanimously negative when a direct order was issued, the receivers still complied with the orders. Most often indirect imperatives received immediate compliance. There were only two reasons receivers reported for noncompliance: (a) the requested action not being the receiver's responsibility; and (b) a subordinate sending an indirect order to a superior or another subordinate. Both of these reasons for noncompliance with an indirect imperative were also associated with negative feelings on the part of the receiver. Both of these reasons for noncompliance involve the prepatory felicity condition. That is, before a request can be made, the receiver of the request must be responsible for the action and the sender should have the right to make the request. The negative feelings associated with direct imperatives seem to be based on the fact that they are a direct order rather than on any of the felicity conditions of the request.

Table 1

Felicity condition/ No. of interaction		Comply/ comply later	Non-compliance	Feelings of receiver Pos.	Neg.
I. REASON	I1	✓			✓
	I2	✓		✓	
	I3	✓		✓	
	I5	✓		✓	
	I6	✓		✓	
	I25	✓			✓
	I26	✓		✓	
	I27	✓			✓
	I28	✓		✓	
	I29	✓		✓	
A. Reason/Prep	I8	✓		✓	
	I9		✓		✓
	I11	✓		✓	
B. Reason/Prop	I16	✓			✓
II. PREP	I7	✓		✓	
	I10	✓		✓	
	I12	✓		✓	
	I13	✓			✓
	I15		✓		✓
III. PROP	I17		✓		✓
	I18	✓		✓	
	I20		✓		✓
	I21	✓		✓	
	I24	✓		✓	
DIRECT	D23	✓			✓
	D1		✓		✓
	D3	✓			✓
	D4	✓		✓	
	D6	✓			✓

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